

How IBM's Bill Piotrowski Sees Selective Data Transition Driving SAP Success



Bill Piotrowski
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Selective data transition—often referred to as bluefield—is more than a talking point for Bill Piotrowski. As leader of SAP Consulting for the Americas at IBM, this has become the approach that Piotrowski and his teams return to again and again: reusing what works, standardizing where it helps, and modernizing data and code without losing control of scope or timing.

Piotrowski oversees solution design, estimating, and program execution across the United States, Canada, Mexico, and Latin

America. His teams have run dozens of selective migrations, stepped in to rescue projects midstream, and moved IBM itself to S/4HANA in just 18 months, using SNP for data movement and smartShift for code automation and dual maintenance. The work begins with value engineering and KPI benchmarks, then carries through to end-to-end testing, repeatable data loads, and cutover rehearsals.

Below, Piotrowski reflects on IBM's journey with its "Rapid Move" methodology for selective data transition, keys to success post-go-live, and the increasing importance of value engineers in the transformation process.

This interview has been edited and condensed for length and clarity.

Q: In the SAP user ecosystem, the subject of hybrid migration transformation has been top-of-mind, especially for those moving their SAP systems from on-premises to the cloud. Why is this the right methodology for so many customers, and what role does IBM play?

At IBM, we are seeing a lot of positive momentum with what we call hybrid migration transformation. For companies that are currently running SAP ECC workloads, we are finding that the hybrid migration transformation, also known as what SNP calls bluefield, is very effective. We have a methodology called Rapid Move. It is also called selective data migration. This hybrid approach is proving to be the most effective approach for our clients who have existing ECC workloads.

Why is it the most effective? Number one, it gives our clients options around what their solution will look like in the future, taking advantage in a very positive way of what they already have in their landscape. A lot of companies benefit from the hybrid approach because we are able to reuse elements of the solution that work fine for their business. Maybe it is the chart of accounts. Maybe the company codes match their legal entity structure.

Number two, it gives companies the option to modify elements of their existing solution. As we found in one of our new life sciences clients, they were using SAP in a non-standard way as it related to sales bills of materials. It gave that client an opportunity to change the way the sales bill of materials is used in a way that is more standard from an S/4 perspective.

Third, the hybrid approach gives our clients an opportunity to transform, where they can differentiate themselves, either as they attract new customers or



as they bring efficiency and productivity into their operations. That comes through the adoption of new S/4 innovations, process automation, or business AI.

We like this approach because it can be delivered in a reasonable duration and at a reasonable level of affordability and risk. A lot of companies have invested significant CapEx and time into their ECC journeys. When they look at the daunting task of migrating to S/4HANA, it often does not have a strong business case. With this hybrid approach, because we reuse a big part of the solution, we can go faster, with fewer resources, and more cost-effectively.

We have done more than 50 of these hybrid migrations, and we have a very successful track record. We are also completing more programs than we start. Think of environments where they start down a path, and we actually pick up that project as part of a rescue mission. Adobe was working with another partner, and we stepped in. We re-solutioned. We are now live. We have been live since April. We have completed a couple of month-end closes and a quarter-end close, and Adobe is now fully on S/4HANA.

We feel very strongly that the hybrid approach makes sense for a lot of the existing ECC install base. By definition, hybrid can be along a continuum, from reuse and migrating the existing solution to greater degrees of transformation. These hybrid approaches end up tailored and a little bespoke to each company's situation, because we like to meet clients where they are on their journey and how their SAP solution is giving them the capabilities they need for their priorities around growth and efficiency.

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Q: You mentioned value engineers. How can they review transformation goals, identify additional ways to add value, and help with that first step of building an effective business case—especially in light of your comment about finishing more projects than you start?

We find it incredibly important that the return on the investment and the individual value pools that add up to those benefits are the best way to justify and get business and board support for a migration transformation to S/4HANA.

Without a business case, the migration costs alone become less of a priority for the CFO and other decision makers. With a business case, you can get momentum around cost savings as well as growth, both top line and bottom line. We start with identifying value pools by looking at how a company is performing against peers on key performance indicators in comparison to industry benchmarks.

As an example, we would look at a company's days sales outstanding. If DSO is higher than the benchmark—we are working with a life sciences company whose DSO is 63 days, over two months—that will point to capabilities that can move the needle on DSO. That could be invoice accuracy, the ability to pursue collection of past-due payments, optimizing dispute management, or having a more effective customer service capability, so it is clear what customers owe and by when.

What this allows us to do is say: here is where you are on KPIs, and here is the opportunity set around the value pool. It could be working capital, P&L, or profitability. We calculate and measure those, and they point to business capabilities. Then we ask: what capabilities do you have today in your SAP and non-SAP systems, and what do you need in new platforms? It could be S/4HANA, other SAP cloud applications, or even non-SAP applications.

In our Rapid Discovery, we build a matrix of value pools, business capabilities, and technology solution

enablers. Then we put together an implementation roadmap. Now it is a business-led transformation rather than an IT project. IT projects are often not successful because they do not have the same senior leadership momentum. They can be myopically focused on implementing a technology and only looking at cost, losing the perspective of why we are doing this from a business perspective. All of these programs must be business-led. We do those with our own value engineers, also in collaboration with SAP's value engineers.

Q: IBM has been leading by example through its own internal transformation. You moved with a hybrid approach and made it a larger business transformation, not just IT. Could you talk about the decisions you made around whether to go to RISE or not, and how that was structured from the beginning?

IBM has been around for 114 years. We are accustomed to shifting the products and services we bring to clients as waves of technological change are upon us. Right now, we are focused on being the leading hybrid cloud and AI company and partner for our clients. When we looked at our back-end applications and infrastructure, we found that we needed to modernize rapidly to support where we are in the age of AI.

At the time, we were still deploying ECC to different parts of our organization. We wanted to drive a growth agenda and a productivity and efficiency agenda with an ambitious cost takeout that started around a billion and a half and has grown to almost three billion dollars. Starting with value, then looking at capabilities, we said we need to modernize our core, move that core to the cloud, and do it quickly. That way, we could activate process automation and new innovations on a modern platform like SAP S/4HANA and business AI.

We asked what we could get done in an 18-month horizon, because we did not have a long duration to run an extensive, long program. We wanted top- and

bottom-line impact quickly. We had been doing this hybrid migration transformation approach for clients with a lot of success, and we decided to do it for ourselves.



We launched a phased discussion of new capabilities we wanted and a roadmap to get there. We focused on improvements and new capabilities in quote-to-cash and record-to-report. We set an 18-month program to migrate and transform using the Rapid Move methodology and tools with our partners SNP and smartShift.

We launched in early 2023 and went live with all countries and business units that were on our old SAP ECC. We brought them live on S/4HANA with this hybrid migration transformation approach in mid-July 2024. Since then, we have continued to bring on new innovations, new process automation, and AI. We also completed the first Rebound Fieldglass implementation on NS2 for FedRAMP, designed for companies and agencies with specific data sovereignty requirements. Additionally, we moved our HR function globally from Workday to SuccessFactors with a go-live in January 2025. We have continued to add capabilities in commerce and configure-price-quote to bring to life recent software acquisitions with recurring subscription billing requirements.

Today, we are all about the ecosystem. We find that bringing the best of the ecosystem forward yields the best outcomes for clients. We used SNP for selective data transition. SNP plays an important role with a

strong platform in Kiano that allows us to evaluate, reuse, modify, and transform. It also automates moving master, transaction, and historical data from ECC to S/4.

SmartShift has a couple of products we used. We used smartShift to automate a large degree of custom developments in our ECC that we needed going forward in S/4. We automated 94% of our custom code. In effect, we monetized the custom code so it would work in S/4. That allowed us to move much faster and saved months off the program. We also used smartShift for managing a typical challenge around dual maintenance, where you retrofit enhancements from production into the development landscape for S/4. That way, when you go live, you have everything you had in ECC plus recent enhancements, as well as the new capabilities S/4 brings to bear.

Main point: we are doing it for our commercial clients around the world in multiple industries, and we believed in it enough to do it for IBM itself. We continue to optimize performance using AI and the latest capabilities SAP offers with S/4 and other platforms.

Q: From your leadership position, what were the major keys to success—governance, roles, program structure—that proved most instrumental after go-live?

A lot of companies running a single instance of ECC ask how to deploy using the hybrid approach. Should it be big bang or phased? Starting from a single instance, we are finding in all cases the right approach, the most risk-mitigated, that maintains the integrity of integrated business processes at the right pace and budget, is big bang. Clients often think phased is better.

How do you have confidence that a big-bang go-live makes sense? We run a very rigorous process during the program. It focuses on three main things, maybe four.

Number one: incredibly robust testing of end-to-end business processes. In effect, it is a regression test of everything you do today, plus testing any new capabilities you choose to move forward with.

Number two: repetitive, rigorous execution of data conversions. That includes data extract, transformation, load, and verification. Both automated verification and verification by the business are done very repetitively. We did this at Pfizer, IBM, and Adobe, with multiple mock loads before production loads.

Number three: making sure you practice the cutover. We know all activities and their sequence, and that they fit into the downtime window the business can afford from the moment we take down ECC to the moment we stand up S/4. As we do more hybrid migrations, we convert larger workloads in shorter time periods by applying lessons learned from prior go-lives—technical, people, and process optimization. For example, we now move a lot more static data during uptime, so that in downtime we are moving less data and need less time.

Number four: whatever you are doing is anchored back to business value and the capabilities that deliver that value. Use that as a mechanism for scope management. Resist the temptation to bring new capabilities into the hybrid migration transformation window. If you identify new capabilities you want, have the discipline to say they were not part of the original business case and value. Put them post-go-live as deferred items in ongoing release management and continuous improvement waves.

That allows a very successful hybrid migration: value-anchored, scalable for the future, delivered on time and on budget, with a release valve for the business to get new capabilities after go-live.

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